

[From American Legion Post 117 Veterans Day Ceremony, Nov. 11, 2015]

AMERICAN LEGION POST 117 VETERANS DAY CEREMONY

(By Don Hirst)

Good morning and thank you all for coming to Post 117's Veterans Day Event.

Let me start off by asking for a show of hands, to include family members and surviving spouses. Please leave them up until I'm finished with a few brief questions, if you can.

How many of you are veterans of World War II? Of the Korean War? The Cold War? Vietnam? Grenada, Panama or similar actions? Desert Storm? Afghanistan? Iraq? Deployments to support any of those action or similar ones I've overlooked?

Now look around the room. Quite a lot of hands, right? Okay, please put them down and relax while I make a few observations and comments. Everyone who raised a hand is a veteran, or a significant part of a veteran's family. Some of you may even be both.

Today is Veterans Day, and that's why we're gathered here and in tens of thousands of other places across the nation and the world: to mark an important date in America's history. For us, it's a day that represents a whole lot more than big sales at the supermarket, shopping mall or car dealerships. Yeah, we all may take part in some of that, but we know to the core of our being that it's intended to honor those who served the nation and served it well. You're all part of that select group. Many of you bear scars, physical or otherwise, as a result of your service.

So what does it mean to be a veteran? In the minds of a lot of folks, a veteran is someone whose service is over, tour of duty ended. That's a long way from the truth. Especially in today's world, with all of the dangers and challenges that seem to be popping up everywhere. Kind of like a grim version of Whack-a-Mole.

As I sat writing this a couple of days ago, the news reports once again trumpeted more acts of violence against the nation's citizens. Two American trainers—civilians but working to help train police in Jordan, a U.S. ally headed by a courageous leader with extensive military experience and service—were gunned down in an apparent blue-on-blue attack. They were murdered by a Jordanian officer. This wasn't the first such case we've encountered in recent years and in different locations. It won't be the last, either. You can take that to the bank.

The list of incidents, both overseas and, increasingly, at home here in the United States, grows with each flip of the calendar page. Unless you're totally ignorant, oblivious or intellectually challenged—or a combination of all three—you sense with a growing feeling of foreboding that we are at war.

So what do we do about it?

This isn't the venue to get into partisan political discussions, something we're not supposed to do at official events since we're part of the American Legion and thus have nonprofit, tax-exempt status. We Legion members each have our own political beliefs, but we're a nonpartisan organization. We do our politicking informally, over a beer, and at the local precinct ballot box each election day. As an aside, I hope all of you voted on November 3 and repeat that civic duty in the coming year. Voting is a precious right. That right was earned by blood sacrifices of the past, and is kept alive by the sacrifices that will come.

But let's get back to the "what do we do about it?" part. The situation is serious—and getting worse. The historian in me says that we arguably haven't been in such perilous

times since the 1930s. Back then we saw economic chaos, the rise of Nazi Germany, Japanese militarism and a continued avoidance of taking action by the great democracies of the world.

Finally, of course, we did act, winning a stunning, hard fought victory against the forces of pure evil. We won, and that's a fact beyond dispute. But we paid a much higher price for that victory by not acting sooner, when decisive action may well have saved millions from a horrible fate.

I think we're at such a crossroads today. Even a casual glance at the headlines shows how dangerous it is right now. And it's likely to get worse before it's over.

As the horizon grows darker, I believe it's a good idea to take stock of where we are, what assets we have and what we can do about it. I'm not advocating forming a militia of disgruntled, angry veterans or vigilante groups. But I am strongly urging us as free citizens, neighbors in the vibrant, close-knit communities of the Northern Neck, to stand up and stand together so that we are better prepared for what may come.

It's like insurance. You might not need it right this second, but when you do, it's too late to buy a policy after the flood waters reach the second floor of your home or the volunteer fire department battles the blaze threatening your house.

Now let me ask for one more show of hands. Are there any members of our local government, our sheriff's department or other similar agencies here today? Please raise your hands. And if there aren't any hands up, I expect that more than one person here today is acquainted with such folks and can help spread the word.

You saw a few minutes ago how many people raised their hands when I asked about prior military service. They're veterans. They're experienced. They've been in the tough places, done the tough jobs. And they're an extremely valuable asset that shouldn't be overlooked in future times of need. Those times could be months or years from now—or maybe never come. Or they could be this afternoon or tomorrow. Think Pearl Harbor. And 9-11.

So I urge the local authorities to reach out, to connect with us, the veterans who are your friends and neighbors. We're here, we're near—and we're something you should put in the emergency kit. This T-shirt I ordered [holds up T-shirt in front of the audience] came in the mail just in time for Veterans Day. Rather than wear it under my shirt, I wanted to use it to reinforce my point. I don't know if you all can see it, but the inscription on the back says,

VETERAN.

Don't Think Because My Time Has

Ended

That I Won't Suit Up Again &

Protect This Flag

Against Terrorism

On American Soil

I'd add protecting against other threats to the terrorism part, because that's what we can do, too.

At the dawn of the birth of our nation, a group of poorly armed patriots stood together at Concord Bridge to fight for their freedom against the might of the British army. Standing strong against great odds also is the theme of the epic poem "Horatius at the Bridge" written by English poet Thomas Babington Macaulay in 1842. The poem tells of a time in ancient Rome when the citizens wanted self-rule against kings and tried to hold the city against the king's attacking army. One bridge across the Tiber River had to be demolished by the defenders for the city to hold, but they needed time to do it.

Horatius, a valiant Roman soldier, and two stalwart comrades-in-arms, stood shoulder-to-shoulder at that bridge. They bought the time needed. It was Winston Churchill's favorite poem, and a few short verses tell you why:

Then out spake brave Horatius,  
the Captain at the Gate.

"To every man upon this earth

Death cometh soon or late.

And how can man die better

Than facing fearful odds

For the ashes of his fathers

And the temples of his gods.

So saddle up, fellow veterans. We've got a job to do. See you at the bridge!

## IN RECOGNITION OF NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

HON. WILLIAM R. KEATING

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 19, 2015

Mr. KEATING. Mr. Speaker, since its designation in 1990, this month seeks to honor the influence of Native Americans in shaping American history, acknowledging the injustices wrought upon the many tribes, and looking forward so we can strive to forge a better future together for all.

As we prepare to celebrate the 394th anniversary of the first Thanksgiving in Plymouth, Massachusetts, so too should we pay tribute to the significant contributions of the original Americans. As some of the earliest inhabitants of this beautiful land, the Native Americans paved the way for future settlements by mastering skilled ways of farming, discovering natural medicines, and hunting.

Their contributions to our shared history continued through the centuries; they have served in the Armed Forces during times of war and peace. Most notably, we celebrate the service of the Navajo Code Talkers during World War II, who ensured that our vital communications could not be decrypted by the enemy. Native Americans are woven into the nation's fabric, having taught us new sports and craft such as lacrosse, canoeing, kayaking and snowshoeing, as well as provided our shared culture with celebrated athletes, musicians, dancers, politicians, and many more.

Mr. Speaker, Native American Heritage Month is an opportunity for us to reflect on the significant accomplishments of our proud Native American tribes—including the Wampanoag and Aquinnah tribes in my district. I urge my colleagues to join me in recognizing all Native American tribes across the nation for their indomitable spirit and remarkable achievements.

## INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

HON. MICHAEL M. HONDA

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 19, 2015

Mr. HONDA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and observe November 25th as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.